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SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION ASSISTS IN  
PROSECUTION OF GUATEMALAN CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE CASES

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (U) Summary: International Justice Mission representatives discussed with us the organization's successes in assisting the Guatemalan Attorney General's Office in prosecuting child sexual abuse cases. They estimated a 90 percent conviction rate in Guatemala for the select group of cases it accepts each year and stressed that IJM's mission is structural change to ensure the rights of the child. End summary.

¶2. (U) Poloff met with Elizabeth Vitell, International Justice Mission (IJM) Regional Director for Latin America, and Pablo Villeda, Guatemala Office Director, on June 11. Vitell described IJM as a faith-based, case-oriented organization established in 1997 that takes on individual cases of oppression and injustice in 14 countries worldwide, including bonded labor and human trafficking in India, illicit land expropriation in Africa, and unprosecuted rape cases in Guatemala.

¶3. (U) Vitell emphasized that IJM only works in countries that prohibit the targeted conduct and that its staff, which includes lawyers, social workers, trained investigators, and psychologists, engage in a range of activities, from conducting investigations and collecting evidence to presenting testimony, transporting witnesses to hearings, and reintegrating rescued victims. In Latin America, IJM's newest region, IJM has a presence in Guatemala, Bolivia, Honduras, and Peru. Guatemalan cases are referred to them by local NGOs, the municipality, and the Attorney General's Office.

¶4. (SBU) According to Guatemala Office Director Villeda, IJM has had a presence in Guatemala since 2005 and is currently staffed by a team of eight employees and two volunteers. The Guatemala Office has focused solely on cases in Guatemala City and has appeared as a third party in legal actions under provisions of the ILO convention on the rights of the child. When asked whether it has been targeted by threats or other acts of intimidation in Guatemala, Villeda responded that there have been no threats against the organization, in part because it keeps a very low profile. Regional Director Vitell explained that IJM does not publicize its work, evangelize its clients, or interfere with the local justice system.

¶5. (U) Vitell estimated IJM's conviction rate in Guatemala is 90 percent, with an average of 22 cases per year. She acknowledged, however, that IJM does not accept every case referred to them, but rather focuses on child sexual abuse cases and uses a 10-step casework methodology to determine which cases to accept. The methodology assesses sufficiency of evidence, culpability, and other relevant factors. IJM works in partnership with the University of Rafael Landivar

Legal Clinic and is part of a local victims assistance network.

¶6. (U) Vitell noted that the organization has good relations with local attorneys, and that it assists the Attorney General's Office in preparing evidence and preparing witnesses, while giving the Office full credit. She stressed that the goal is structural change to effectively prevent and prosecute cases of child sexual abuse, most of whom have been abused by family members. She noted that the municipality has a shelter for high-risk children, and that Fundacion de Castillo has good shelters where children can stay for six months, or longer if granted an extension by a judge.

¶7. (U) Comment: IJM's successes in assisting prosecutors achieve convictions in rape and sexual abuse cases are an example of how outside experts, like the UN-proposed International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), can greatly improve prosecution rates in Guatemala.  
Derham